



Family Frenzies

By Penny Woods

An Urnest Proposal

Time has passed since my husband and I made our visitation to the mortuary. I discover that when it comes to actually purchasing our cemetery spaces, my husband has cold feet, so I decide to visit the mortuary on my own. I am anxious and plan to be in and out quickly!

As I wait for the B.N. (Before Needs) Counselor, I notice the flower shop sign. "Please inquire about our placement service."

To tell you the truth, I am more concerned about my final up or down placement, rather than the horizontal level.

The B.N. counselor greets me. "Nice day."

"Would you like to take a look at the property first?" he asks.

"If it's still not taken," I joke. "A fast drive by is all right, but let's not linger."

Soon we stand on no. 1316. I don't feel like I've bought the ranch exactly, but it is the only California real estate nobody else will want, no matter how much the market erodes. He

reminds me:

"Property closer to the statuary, the mosaics, or the trees, does cost more."

"That's O.K.," I assure him. "I never could get enough sun."

Later, we ascend the spiral staircase in the main building and enter a comfortable room in order to put a lid on the financial end of it. He lays out the papers.

"Please dig down with that pen," he says as I sign. "It has to go through five copies."

"No problem," I answer a little breathlessly.

I recall my mother-in-law who went coffin shopping with her best friend. They selected identical coffins, but chose different interiors. My mother-in-law used hers first. At the funeral her friend whispered to me. "They have put her in my coffin by mistake, but I am staying composed."

"I have two plots—I mean spots—of good news," says the B.N. Counselor, bringing me back from my nightmares. "Steel yourself for this. Your new grave sites come with the

interior vault built in and drainage is included."

"Then am I to inter—I mean infer—that it is watertight?" I ask. Two can play this game.

The B.N. Counselor chortles merrily and gives me the other good news. "For every referral you make," he promises, "You will receive a modest fee."

"Well, thank you," I say. "That can be applied to my urn." I decide to go with an urn rather than the preservation approach. I have worn enough makeup in my life to know better than to let someone create a cosmetic effect I can't check out. Also, I remember the tossing of a friend's ashes into the ocean when a sudden wind blew some ashes back into our boat. I want mine to stay put. All I need is an urn small enough to show the family that when push comes to shovel, I really could lose that extra weight.

And as for that referral fee, anyone looking for a plot? (Feet first occupancy.)

The Los Angeles Bulletin

Thursday, May 13, 1993

Moving Out, Ready or Not

A large adult-child still lives at our house. He has a job, but hasn't felt the urge to move on. After close to a quarter of a century in the same comfortable spot, it is easier for him to stay put—and more financially beneficial.

This questionable line of thinking calls for parental action which can readily occur after a few choice words between the interested parties, during which said adult-child declares he will do as he

darned well pleases and stomps out.

My husband and I stare at each other. "I am thinking of draining his waterbed," he says.

"Me, too," I answer.

"I'll get the hose hooked up."

"And I'll drive to the store for packing boxes."

For the next couple hours, our ecstasy is so high as we stuff boxes with years of notebooks, tests, papers, and books, that we hardly break

sweat.

"I'm ripping the phone out," I say, caught up in the abandonment of the moment.

"I'm dismantling the bookcase," he answers gleefully.

"No more clock. No more radio." "Toss the dirty clothes on the closet floor." "I'm stacking these boxes outside by the trashcans. If they're still there in 30 days, we donate them." So go the snatches of conversation.

"You know, it sure would be

nice to get that bedroom door off," I suggest.

The big desk is pushed from where it blocked the door to the middle. Only it and the waterbed frame remain in the emptied room. The cleared rug is vacuumed. The doorless doorway gives an open feel of freedom to the completed task. Any self-respecting cockroach or mouse who takes a look in this room will scurry away in disappointment.

"Well, he's due back soon," says my husband after a quick shower, "and I'm off to my

Civic Center NewSource

My husband and I are going up the wall with graffiti—the inside kind. Officials say that, with graffiti, the writing is on the wall but people don't want to read it. Right. We want to eliminate it.

"The kids don't consider this serious," complains my husband, frowning with murderous intent at the fingerprint marking on the ceiling. "They're not the poor devil who is having his walls decorated."

"You're right," I agree. "Now graffiti is any form of defacement to property, including scratching and writing."

A little graffiti, homestyle, I can relate to. Like when I soap, "Happy Birthday," across the bathroom mirror or my husband fingers, "Needs wash," on my dusty car hood. But when home taggers streak peanut butter marks across another door jamb and mark more sofa cushions with their uncapped pens, sweaty faces, and nap drool, I am ready to draw the line.

"He says he's an artist," I tell my husband, finding chocolate pudding defacement in the form of a

meeting."

"Thanks," I answer.

The expression on our son's face is half-shock, half-smile, as if to say, "What berserk thing have my confused parents gone and done now?"

"Nothing's damaged," I assure him. "It's all packed nicely."

"You guys are serious, huh?" he comments.

He adjusts well his first night after rediscovering the pullout couch bed in the den, which conveniently has a phone, too.

The next day I return about

noon to find that all boxes are moved back into his room. The big desk is pushed against the space where the door used to be.

Life goes on in our house with the promise of apartment hunting hanging in the air like a white flag of truce. Another battle fought and won by both sides. The war is still undecided. But the scent of victory is closer.

My father used to say, "You can't squeeze blood from a turnip."

I have my doubts.

Monday, June 21, 1993

Graffiti, Homestyle

mountain scene on kitchen drawers. "He says he's tried to stop, but he can't." We decide to work an undercover operation in the home to catch the vandals red (or any other color) handed.

Wearing unmarked bathrobes, we stay on duty in the shadows until 1 a.m., watching a hot spot, the kitchen. About midnight one kid creeps into the kitchen and digs into the jar of marshmallow creme. The other kid acts as lookout. Eventually they finish and leave graffiti from the two hot fudge sundaes: smudges on the refrigerator, crumbs on the countertop, and drippings along the floor.

Another time we hide in the shower during early morning to witness a common graffiti incident. A kid shaves, then sprinkles little black hairs over the basin, and deposits great globs of shaving cream on towels.

As a result of Operation GETUP (Graffiti Enforcement Through Undercover Parents) we spend six weeks mixing with our hometagggers during the day, and recording their tagging habits at night.

The sting is cheap, costing us only red eyes and bad tempers from lost sleep. Normally parents spend an outrageous amount in cleaning materials and replacement from graffiti damage.

We confiscate home taggers supplies, like half filled potato chip sacks, ice-cream cartons, and cupboards loaded with cracker boxes and lemonade mix. Each home tagger is fined accordingly, confined to his room at night, and his jelly jars dumped.

"We didn't know tagging in the home was illegal," our children wail.

"Now you do know," admonishes my husband. "And that includes coming within 100 feet of the driveway."

A neighborhood trend is starting with our adopt-a-wall program. Volunteer graffiti busters adopt a room of walls in our house and wash out homestyle graffiti within two hours after it appears. So far there have been no fatalities or injuries resulting from the cleanup program.